

# **WERBiage: *From the NIST Washington Editorial Review Board***

## **Policy Issues — T h e B i g T h r e e**

WERB review of manuscripts entails assessment of scientific merit, writing quality, and the “big three” publication policy issues:

- I.** Commercial and brand name references
- II.** SI (International System) units
- III.** Measurement uncertainty analysis

Among them, the big three are the main reasons manuscripts are returned to authors. Here is a brief overview. Look for additional articles on each topic in forthcoming issues of *ISDirections*.

- I.** Can I refer to commercial entities and use brand names in my papers? NIST policy strongly discourages use of commercial, trade, and brand names in technical writing. When such usage is considered essential or is required (some journals expect names and addresses of suppliers in the description of protocol), an appropriate disclaimer must be conspicuously included. Manuscripts lacking this disclaimer, or incorporating an inappropriate one, are always returned to authors. Acceptable disclaimers can be obtained from your WERB Sponsor or from the WERB Secretary.
- II.** Must I use SI units in my papers, even when they’re not common to my field? Yes. It is official policy to report all dimensioned measurement and computational results in SI units. “Common” units can be reported in following parenthesis, for example, 101.3 kPa (760.0 torr). Manuscripts ignoring SI units are typically returned to authors. For general information, see NIST Special Publication 811, Guide for the Use of the International System of Units, <http://physics.nist.gov/Pubs/SP811/contents.html>. Does WERB make SI exceptions? Yes, exceptions are allowed in special cases, including incorporation of long tables taken from other sources, and manuscripts intended for certain “targeted audiences.” However, assertions such as, “...everybody in this field measures frequencies in ppm, or energies in Kcal/mole, etc.” normally fall on deaf ears.
- III.** Must I really include error bars and uncertainties, especially when I don’t know what they are? It is official policy that assessing and reporting uncertainties is an integral part of the measurement and computational processes that engage NIST scientists and engineers. WERB, recognizing a lack of universal agreement within NIST on the best ways of doing this, is flexible — to a degree — in assessing adherence to stated policy. Manuscripts ignoring uncertainties, where the need is evident, are always returned to authors. For a concise description of NIST uncertainty policy, see <http://physics.nist.gov/cuu/Uncertainty/basic.html>.

—Norm Berk, WERB Chair